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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 002271

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA, AF/SPG, AF/E (GARAY), AMMAN FOR
FREDERIC, JERUSALEM FOR KAPLAN

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SUBJECT: REFUGEE PROTESTS OUTSIDE UNHCR CAIRO OFFICE

REF: 2006 CAIRO 170

Classified By: Minister Counselor for Economic and Political Affairs
William R. Stewart for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: UNHCR's Deputy Regional Representative told us October 27 that recent refugee protests, outside the Cairo UNHCR office have grown and become more vocal. Refugees and asylum seekers are upset by the lack of resettlement options and the insufficiency of UNHCR's financial and healthcare assistance. Egyptian security, based on a request from UNHCR, tripled its security in the area, which probably prevented a larger protest on October 27. UNHCR is beginning to implement a program of individual consultations with refugees to discuss benefit options and quell refugee dissatisfaction with UNHCR benefits and services. However, unless funding increases it is unlikely to assuage the refugees in the long-term, and demonstrations may begin anew. End Summary.

12. (C) Katharina Lumpp, Deputy Regional Representative at UNHCR's Cairo office, on October 27 told us that for the last few Mondays, African refugees and asylum seekers have staged protests outside the UNHCR offices in the 6 October City suburb, west of Cairo. Refugees and asylum seekers are dissatisfied with the lack of resettlement options and the insufficiency of UNHCR's financial and healthcare assistance. Lumpp said the original protest involved only Somali women, but in successive weeks the protests grew to include Darfuri women. She informed us that the protest on October 20 was the largest to date. It "involved 40-50 women, blocked the street in front of the UNHCR office, and was extremely vocal." Some UNHCR staff members feared for their safety, so UNHCR asked Egyptian security for assistance. Egyptian security responded by tripling its presence in front of the UNHCR building. According to our contacts in the Sudanese refugee community, the increased security presence deterred a scheduled October 27 protest that was to have included South Sudanese, Darfuri and Nuba Mountain refugees and asylum seekers. Lumpp admits that there is a lack of trust between UNHCR and the Sudanese refugee community, especially after the Mustafa Mahmoud incident in December 2005 that left 27 Sudanese asylum seekers dead (reftel).

Growing Refugee Frustrations

13. (SBU) Community and NGO leaders in the Sudanese slum of Arba wa Nuss and the lower, middle-class neighborhood of Ain Shams told us that Sudanese male refugees find it nearly impossible to get jobs in Egypt. "There is tremendous

discrimination against Sudanese men because they fight for the same unskilled labor jobs as many Egyptian men." If they manage to obtain a job, they are paid approximately 300 Egyptian pounds (USD 55) per month; the equivalent of a month's rent for a one-room apartment in Arba wa Nuss. This leaves no money for food or transportation to go to and from the job. Magda Ali, the Director of Ma'an, A Sudanese Women's NGO told us that Sudanese women have more job prospects and earn more than men. Many women work as maids and earn about 500 Egyptian pounds (USD 90) per month. However she said that Sudanese maids are often subjected to sexual assault by their employers.

¶4. (SBU) During our discussions with leaders in the refugee communities, educational opportunities are often one of the main complaints. Sudanese refugees, unlike other African refugees, may attend Egyptian public schools, but these schools are overcrowded and many have informal policies to reject Sudanese students. UNHCR provides official refugees and asylum seekers a 100 Egyptian pound (USD 18) yearly educational stipend. However, refugee leaders told us that this paltry amount does not begin to cover the cost of educational materials, or school uniforms. As a result, many refugee children attend unofficial schools or do not attend school. Additionally, South Sudanese, the largest refugee group in Egypt, no longer qualify for resettlement after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) in January ¶2005. These factors have led to a growing sense of hopelessness and aggravation with UNHCR in the refugee communities.

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UNHCR's Plan for Individual Consultations

¶5. (SBU) Lumppp told us UNHCR and its partner organizations are starting to implement a program of individual consultations to better address refugee needs and reduce refugee frustration. She said "Each refugee is unique, and each case needs to be looked at individually." This program will allow us to listen to the people, and explain what type of assistance is possible, she continued. However, she expressed frustration that "UNHCR is mandated to assist in all refugee needs: education, healthcare, and resettlement, but we cannot assume responsibility for their lives." Lumppp expects that the individual consultations with Somalis will be successful, but doubts that the program will have the same effect on the Darfuri refugees. Still she opined, "We need to maintain a dialogue with the refugees, and the individual consultations are the only way to accomplish this."

¶6. (C) Comment: There is a growing sense of frustration in the refugee communities in Egypt. Refugees and asylum seekers, primarily from Sub-Saharan Africa, suffer from discrimination, price inflation of basic foodstuffs, and a lack of resettlement options. They are also upset by the insufficiency of financial assistance for living expenses and the paucity of UNHCR's education and healthcare funds. Our meetings with leaders in the refugee communities revealed a lack of faith in the UN refugee system and contempt for the host government. Recent protests have driven this point home to UNHCR and it is now taking some steps to address the issue. However, unless monetary resources increase, it is unlikely that explanation of why financial benefits are not available will assuage refugee and asylum seekers. Many leaders in Arba wa Nuss told us that living conditions are so bad that attempting to cross illegally into Israel is increasingly more attractive as "the only chance for a better life."
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